



**Veteran volunteers Kim Bolack (left) and Jon Pintello perform renovations outside the new vets' home Thursday.**

# At Their Service

## State's First Center for Homeless Vets Nearly Ready

**By KRISTIN BLOOMER**  
Herald Staff

From 9 a.m. each morning, well toward midnight, men have been spackling, sanding, insulating and transforming a large condemned house at the corner of Crescent and Grove streets.

One wing of the house is still gutted, filled with holes, broken windows, stripped of its plumbing.

The other wing, bearing a fresh coat of white paint with green trim, is almost ready to become a transitional house — or development center — for homeless veterans.

"It will be a place people want to move into and take care of," said Robert Rummell, a Vietnam vet who is a board member of the local Veterans Assistance Office.

It also will be the first facility of its kind in the state.

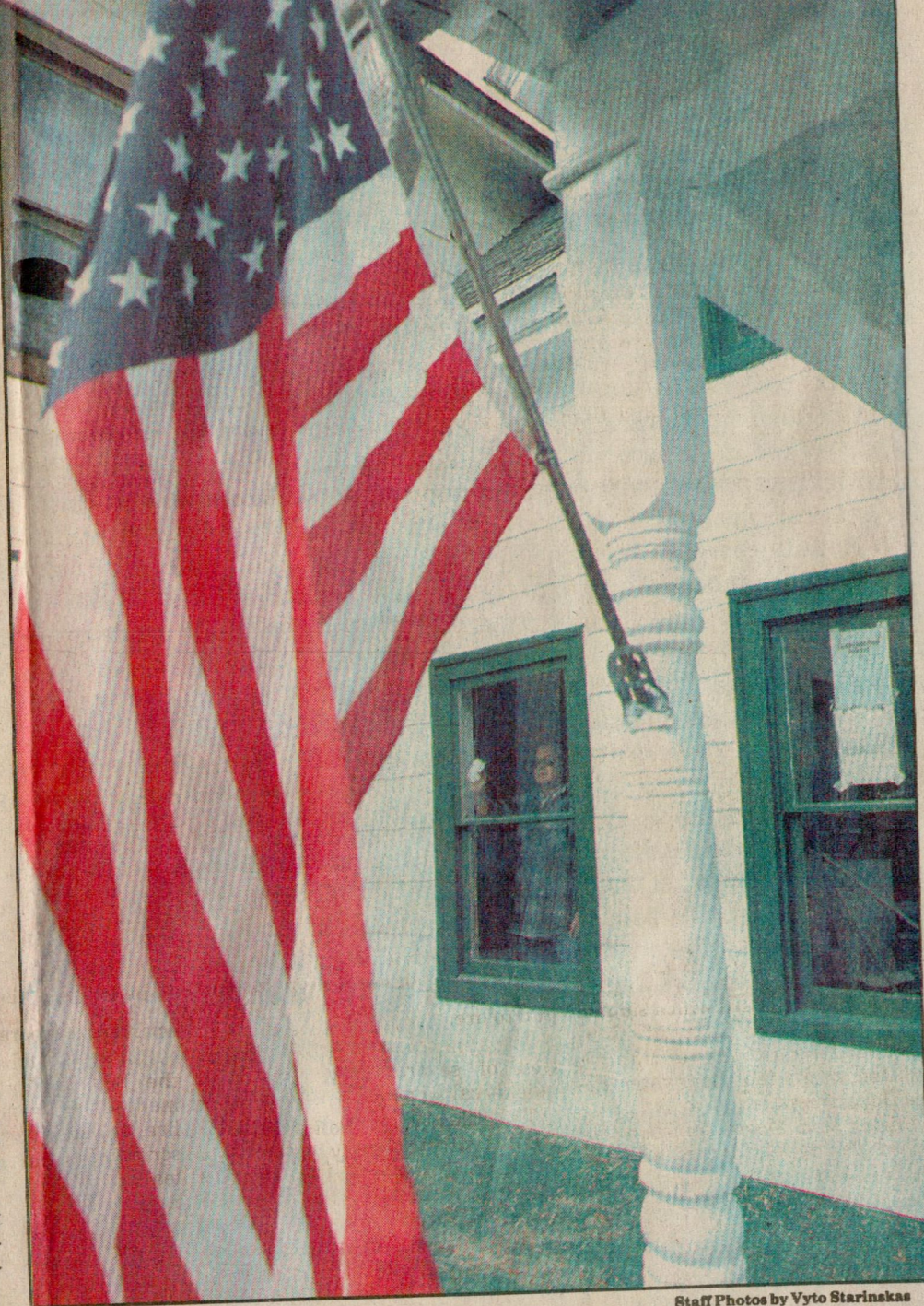
"What we know is that veterans work well with veterans," he said. "There is a certain brotherhood ..."

The unfinished half of the house will serve as a teaching tool for residents without job skills. With support from men who have been through similar experiences, the residents will help transform the house — like those working Thursday afternoon.

Once the larger wing is finished, it may also house a computer lab and teaching center led by veterans with business and communication skills.

Friday, from noon to 4 or 6 p.m. — depending on traffic — the house will be open to

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Staff Photos by Vyto Starinskas

**Veteran Chester Hallock washes paint from a window at the new facility for homeless vets on Grove Street.**





VETERANS  
• ASSISTANCE  
OFFICE

Exterior





Staff Photos by David Jenne

Officials look over a section of the Dodge Veterans' Center awaiting renovation (left) and center manager Duane Wheeler (right) relaxes on the porch after a dedication ceremony Wednesday.

Rut. Herald 10-5-95

# Home for the Homeless

## Veterans' Shelter Gets \$60,000 Government Boost

By FREDERICK BEVER  
Herald Staff

Twenty-five years after returning from the Cambodian border, where he was a transportation engineer with the U.S. Army First Infantry Division, Tunbridge native Duane Wheeler has found a home.

"We never made the adjustment after coming back from Vietnam or fit back in," Wheeler said. "I felt like an outcast for years."

But on Wednesday, he led the pledge of allegiance for a congregation of dozens of local officials and

veterans in front of a Crescent Street house that is the first homeless shelter for veterans in Vermont.

Wheeler lives there now and is managing the Dodge Veterans' Center while it undergoes a transformation from a three-bed shelter and assistance office to a 19-bed facility.

"The attitude of the American people about the war — I see it changing now," Wheeler said. And so has the federal government's attitude.

The federal government sent a representative —

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## Veterans

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and a \$60,775 check — to the shelter's dedication ceremony.

Kathy Jurado, assistant secretary for the U.S. Department of Veterans' Affairs, said that up to one-third of the nation's 500,000 homeless are veterans, predominantly veterans of the Vietnam conflict.

Her office has handed out more than \$6 million this year to programs like the Rutland initiative.

"Veterans have a distinct culture — they need an atmosphere that is friendly for them," Jurado said. "I hope this award will in some small way help this community help its homeless veterans."

The idea for the Dodge Development Center first came up in 1982 when Michael T. Dodge, a veteran of the Vietnam war, went to Washington, D.C., to participate in ground-breaking ceremonies for the Vietnam memorial known as "The Wall."

"It wasn't until The Wall that the healing started," said Clark Howland, a friend of Dodge's and now the director of operations for the shelter and assistance office. "After that, the Vietnam vets realized that a veteran is a veteran is a veteran, it doesn't matter what war you were in."

They also realized that they had each other, according to Howland. "In 'Nam, you depended on your buddies, but you came back alone," Howland said. "Now, when you get two veterans together, they don't even have to talk, and you can feel the energy."

Dodge committed suicide in 1986, but his passion for helping veterans

lived on in his companions and others who brought the shelter into existence. Sen. James M. Jeffords, R-Vt., Wednesday presented Howland with a picture of Dodge receiving the purple heart, saying that "there is still so much to be done."

James Edge, who sits on the board of the Veterans' Assistance office, said a recent survey calculated there may be as many as 1,000 homeless veterans in Vermont. The new shelter and assistance office are designed to help them get back into society.

"It could be even more, because a lot of times these people don't even identify themselves because they are disenchanted with the Veterans' Administration," Edge said.

An employee of the state Department of Employment and Training, Edge said the homeless veterans are all around.

"They're just quiet," Edge said. "They may not be out there with shopping carts in front of the Kmart — they're living out back of some friend's chicken coop or on a cousin's couch — but they still don't really have a place to live."

Now they will, Edge said, as long as they come up with a life plan that will help them find a job and, eventually, their own place to live.

"This isn't a warehouse — it's a place to learn and get back on your feet."

Howland said he believed Dodge would be proud of the new home.

"It was part of his dream to have this place," Howland said. "I know he's smiling down on what we're doing."



# A haven for veterans

## Renovated House Gets New Life Serving Those Who Served By Chuck Clarino

**t**he Dodge House at 95 Crescent St. in Rutland, not far from the busy corner of Grove Street, sat abandoned and dilapidated for years. In some ways it symbolized the plight of some of our nation's veterans.

The old structure appeared to be falling down, a ramshackle place, a blight on the neighborhood. It was there but never quite seen, gutted and left for the wrecking ball. But its appearance was deceiving. The building was sound, made of stronger stuff. It was simply neglected, needing care and attention to restore it as a vibrant part of the community.

If you pass by the Dodge House today, chances are you'll do a double take. The seedy structure has been transformed into a showplace and completely refurbished, and now proudly assumes its place on the block, ready to open its doors and become a home.

This was not possible without the vision of the Veterans Assistance Office plus many hours of hard work done by volunteer labor, thousands of dollars in grants and donations of money and in-kind services.

In 1993, the building was purchased and plans were made to transform it into a shelter for homeless veterans. Work began on the smaller portion of the house and eventually some homeless vets were served but the big picture was very fuzzy. Five years later it has come into focus.

This coming Monday, the Dodge House will open its doors to the public so everyone can see what five years worth of blood, sweat, tears and dedication to a dream can do. The hope is to get the public interested in the mission of the Dodge House: to provide a shelter and safe haven for the homeless veteran to enable that person to become an independent and integral member of society. The official dedication of the Dodge House will take place on Nov. 11.

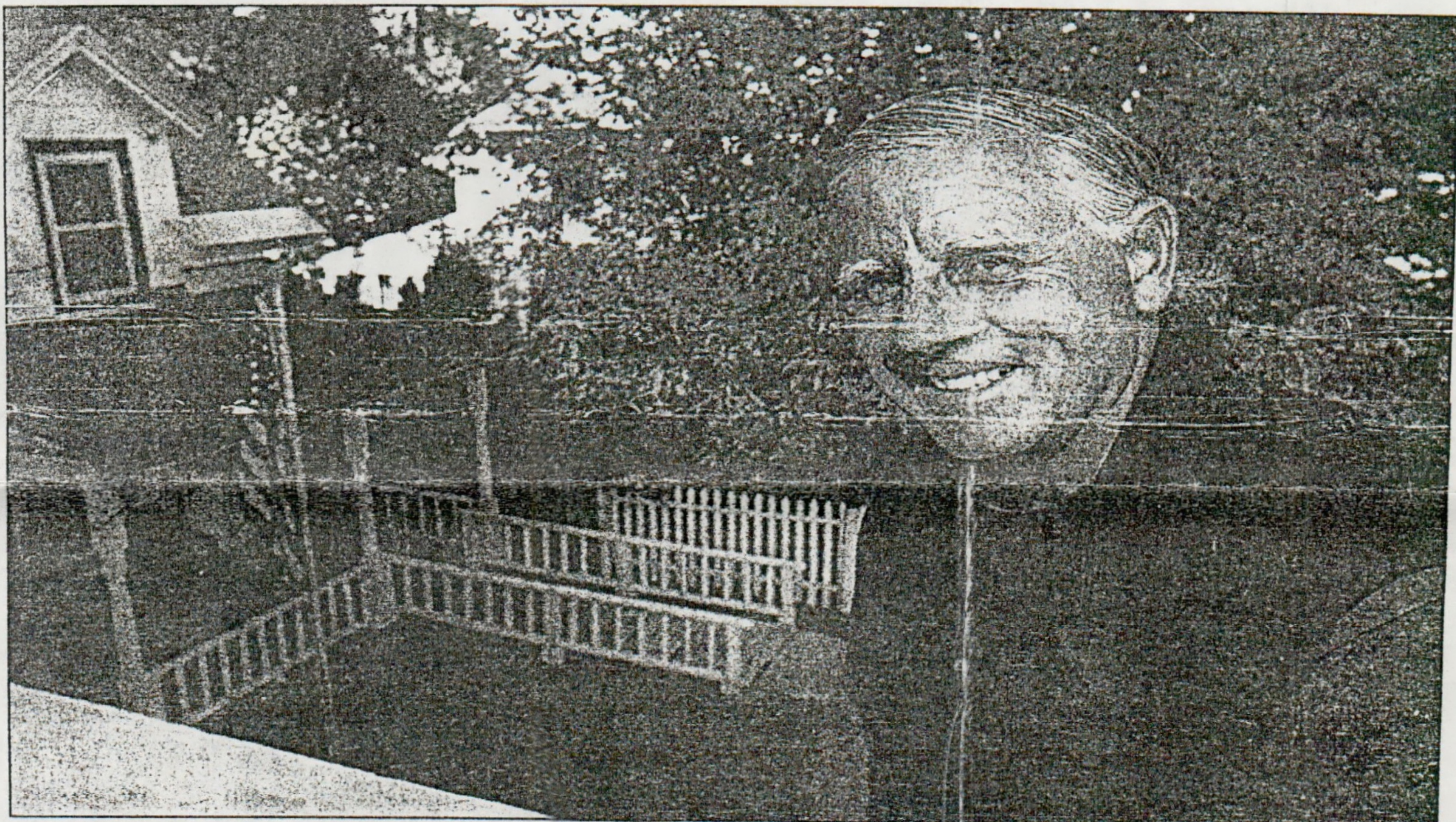
The first project of its kind in the state, the Dodge House is named after the late Mike Dodge, a Vietnam war veteran. Dodge would have been a prime candidate for this house. He suffered from post traumatic stress syndrome and had difficulty dealing with day-to-day living, eventually committing suicide, according to Bob Rummel, chairman of the board for the Veterans Assistance Office in Rutland and a prime mover in the Dodge House project.

Rummel has spent decades of his life assisting veterans and their causes. A decorated Vietnam War veteran as a member of the 101st Airborne, Rummel has been involved in the Dodge House project pretty much from the beginning.

"In 1993 Jim Edge found this home and we decided to buy it and try and fix it up into a shelter for homeless vets," said Rummel, sitting on the porch of the Dodge House on a soft May evening last week. "We got together to make plans and said, 'who has an expertise in grant writing?' Well, I did. 'Who has an expertise in building?' Again, it was me and I ended up doing the project."

The project started with a grant of \$17,000 from the state of Vermont, facilitated by Tony Morgan, who helps deal with the state's homeless.

With that money, they set about refurbishing the smaller ell of the house. Within a year-and-a-half, it began to take in some homeless vets. But money was tight, the task was daunting and it became clear that



Bob Rummel at the Dodge House, a new veterans' home in Rutland.

Staff Photo by Albert J. Marro

renovations had to be made to the entire structure in order to make the project work.

In searching for funding, Rummel found that the Department of Veterans Affairs would kick in because technically this was an existing project. The VA "does not fund ideas," as Rummel is fond of repeating. After much negotiation, the VA eventually contributed a grant of \$65,000.

At least Rummel and his group had some cash but the house had to be brought up to stringent codes. It needed a complete sprinkler system and had to be made completely handicapped accessible, for example. And that was going to be expensive.

With limited funding and only volunteer labor, a concrete timetable for the project was difficult to devise.

"I had no interest in telling people about the place until it was ready to open because the next question was when. And I couldn't tell anybody when," Rummel explained. "We had done one side and were working over here and that was three years ago. If I had said then, 'oh, about three years,' they'd say 'Yeah sure.'"

Rummel took the long view. He could be patient because as he says: "It's hard to put a timetable on an all-volunteer project. I knew it would eventually happen and when it did, it would be great."

So the project went on. Rummel was the front man but many hands helped. They had to pay contractors who came in and did various jobs like putting up plaster board and installing plumbing, but skilled people donated time, and businesses gave discounts or donated materials. All kinds of people helped in myriad ways. Little by little, bit by bit, things came together.

When Rummel swung open the door to give a mini-tour last week, it was clear from the first step inside that the Dodge House was refurbished with care and craftsmanship. A beautiful kitchen and communal living room and dining area dominate the ground floor. There is a totally handicapped accessible bathroom and a small bedroom that is also equipped for a handicapped person.

Rummel envisions this as a small examining room when not used as a bedroom. He hopes to set it up like a clinic and persuade the brass at the Veterans Affairs Hospital in White River Junction to send a physician or physician's assistant to Rutland once a week to deal

with veterans' physical concerns. Typically, local vets can spend most of the day traveling to White River Junction and getting medical needs met.

The ground floor also features a room for the director's office, a back deck and a front porch. There are two staircases that lead to the upstairs, one completely fireproof that serves as a fire escape. Upstairs there are five bedrooms, plus a bathroom with two showers, two toilets and two sinks. A large upstairs porch stands at the front of the building.

"The philosophy is to provide an excellent place for them to live in," said Rummel. "It serves as a model. It's the kind of existence possible. To come into a home that is probably better than the ones most of us live

Rummel explains that this house is more than a shelter.

"We are not the mission and don't want to take the place of the mission," said Rummel. "Usually, there's a referral from some organization. We have a packet of information to find out what the person is all about and what they want. Within two weeks, we hope to work on developing a plan and put it into action."

Rummel cautions that the Dodge House is not a permanent home, more like a halfway house to aid in the transition of a veteran from a bad time when help is needed to independent living.

The house is open to all veterans, not just Vietnam

**"We are trying to recreate a time when we think the vet felt like part of something, like when they were in the service." — Bob Rummel**

in. But it is theirs to help take care of. It's a communal kind of existence."

Rummel says the plan is to create a highly-structured program. The residents will get up at a specific time, eat at a specific time, search for work at a designated time and so forth.

"We are trying to recreate a time when we think the vet felt like part of something, like when they were in the service," he explained. "That structured time might have been the last time they felt positive. We would like to try and put them back in that situation."

There is room for 15 veterans, with two to a bedroom. The staffing is planned to be 24 hours a day, seven days a week. The house will be staffed by a director and night staff with the services of volunteers also factored into the mix. Again, the rules like the structure will be rigid.

"No drinking in the house, no smoking or drugging" said Rummel.

And not just anybody will be allowed entrance. There is a process to gain entry.

vets, and is not for what he calls program cruisers.

Rummel stressed that this project was not about him. He also didn't know if the motivation behind so many volunteers was to "give something back." He did say it was about feeling good and the work he did made him feel good about lending a helping hand.

"There is something in my psyche that says I should do this stuff," Rummel explained. "It's pretty much the same with a bunch of us. We went through some pretty hellacious times and we know a lot of people that didn't make it through. In some ways it makes us feel better about it."

"It's survivor skill training," Rummel continued. "I spent most of my life working with veterans because I thought maybe that's what those people would have done. You really need to live for more than yourself. When you make it and a bunch of other people don't, you spend the rest of your life figuring out why. But you're not going to waste your time. It's not that you do it for them. You do it because you think it's important."





Staff Photo by Vyto Starins

## Veterans Remembered

A firing squad from the American Legion (above) salutes veterans Wednesday morning during Veterans Day ceremonies at American Legion Post 31 on Washington Street in Rutland.

Speakers included Rutland City Mayor Jeffrey Wennberg, Post Commander Paul Terenzini and Franklin Black, past commander of the Disabled American Veterans Chapter 7.

At the Dodge Development Center (right) on Crescent Street, approximately 100 people gathered Wednesday morning to honor veterans.

Derek Cowan (kneeling) listened from the sidewalk at the Dodge Center, a shelter for homeless veterans. A homeless Vietnam War veteran, Bob Lefter, spoke about his experiences after the war and his travels before arriving at the Dodge Center.

The mayor, Lefter and Jeff Hatch shared ribbon-cutting responsibilities at the dedication ceremony. The Rutland High school freshman band, decked out in their new uniforms, played during the ceremony. An open house followed the Veterans Day events.



Staff Photo by Albert J. Marro

Nov 12, 1998



# PURPOSE

The purpose of the VAO is to provide services to veterans in the state of Vermont. Such services may include but are not limited to: housing, job placement, education, medical assistance, transportation, counseling, shelter for the homeless, assistance in communications with the United States Department of Veterans Affairs, and other means of support which assist veterans in improving their status in the community. The Veterans Assistance Office is structured so that veterans from all wars as well as veterans who have served their country in time of need during peacetime can find a friendly face, a hot cup of coffee, and a caring and knowledgeable advisor to assist with their problems. The goal of the office is to meet the needs of all veterans who walk through the door.

**CONTACT: (802) 775-6772**



# DODGE CENTER

The Dodge Development Center is located at 95 Crescent Street in Rutland, Vermont. The Center is dedicated to assisting homeless veterans with shelter, clothing, food, and an individualized program to reintegrate the veteran back into the community in a positive and productive manner so that the veteran once again adds to his/her friends and neighbors. The Center also provides a "safe ground" from which these homeless veterans can grow and experience once again the self esteem so necessary to being a successful member of our community.

**CONTACT: (802) 775-6772**

# How Can You Help

Probably the most asked question of the people associated with the Dodge Center is "How can I help?" Everyone can do something. The Center is always looking for individuals who would like to assist the homeless veterans with their reintegration into the community. If you have a unique approach to assist one or more of these veterans, please contact our Director of Operations at (802) 775-6772, or write to us at:

**PO Box 12  
Rutland, Vermont 05702-0012**

Activities such as on the job training, small discussion groups about job related skills, mentoring and internship programs, and hands on construction support at the Center are already underway.



# How To Contact The VAO

The Veterans Assistance Office is  
located at:

**97 Crescent Street  
Rutland, Vermont 05701**  
(At the corner of Crescent and Grove)

The phone number is:  
**(802) 775-6772**

If you wish to assist in any of the projects currently underway, or have a creative idea about how to improve on services to Veterans in the Rutland area, please contact us at the office or tear off and mail the form below and we will contact you at our earliest convenience.

**I want to work with the VAO in service to  
Vermont Veterans**

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

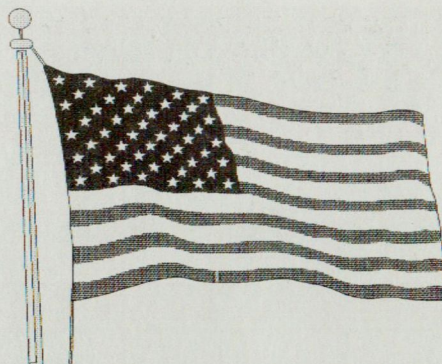
Address: \_\_\_\_\_  
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City: \_\_\_\_\_ State: \_\_\_\_\_ Zip: \_\_\_\_\_

Home Phone: \_\_\_\_\_

Business Phone: \_\_\_\_\_ Ext. \_\_\_\_\_

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_



...Let the word go forth from this time and place, to friend and foe alike, that the torch has been passed to a new generation of Americans -- born in this century, tempered by war, disciplined by a hard and bitter peace, proud of our ancient heritage -- and unwilling to witness or permit the slow undoing of those human rights to which this nation has always been committed, and to which we are committed today at home and around the world.

Let every nation know, whether it wishes us well or ill, that we shall pay any price, bear any burden, meet any hardship, support any friend, oppose any foe to assure the survival and the success of liberty. This much we pledge -- and more...

And so my fellow Americans -- Ask not what your country can do for you -- ask what you can do for your country."

John F. Kennedy  
January 20, 1961

## Veterans

## Assistance

## Office, Inc.



# The Dodge Development Center